

TT No.52: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 28th December 2013; **Frimley Green v Cove**; Combined Counties League Premier Division; Res: 2-1; Att: 52 (h/c); Admission: £6; Programme: £1 (24pp); FGIF Match Rating: ***.

THE HOP: Not my intended destination! For the second time in three days, Plan B was required within 45 minutes of kick-off at Plan A. Our intention was to watch Camberley Town host neighbours and Combined Counties League Premier Division rivals Hartley Wintney. I'd been down to Krooner Park in the morning in the hope of gaining access for photography. The secretary and kitman were conducting a pitch inspection (it passed) and very kindly allowed me the run of the place. We were back in good time for kick-off but there was no sign of programmes and the gateman wasn't confident there would be any. "Sometimes the editor arrives with an armful and sometimes with none at all." Not what the paper chaser wants to hear! A call to Frimley Green's chairman (also the programme editor) confirmed their Co-Co Prem derby with Cove was on and programmes available on the gate. It is only a couple of miles from one ground to the other so, with discretion the better part of valour, we bolted for Frimley Green. I gather, from a poster on a well-known non-league football forum, the programmes at Camberley did turn up - and before kick-off. No matter: Krooner Park will be top of my 'to do' list on the next visit to Farnham and the in-laws. Incidentally, if you enjoy club histories, check out Camberley Town's on their official website. It is a model of its type.

THE PLACE: I've no interest in darts (or any other pub game) but know Frimley Green, specifically the Lakeside Country Club, hosts each January the BDO World Professional Darts Championship. This venue is on the oft-soggy floor of the Blackwater Valley. The bulk of Frimley Green (to an outsider's eyes, indistinguishable from Camberley and Frimley) is higher up the dale side and, as far as I could tell, has the atmosphere of a proper little village.

THE CLUB: Founded in 1919, presumably by what remained of English manhood following the unbelievably pointless slaughter in the Flanders trenches. The Green's recent history has been chequered. In 1981, they graduated to the Combined Counties League from the London Spartan League. Financial problems, in 1994, saw them drop into junior football and the Surrey Intermediate League. Five years on, they rose to the Surrey Premier (later Senior) League and, in 2002, returned to the Combined Counties League. Last season, Frimley Green topped the First Division table and secured promotion to the Premier Division.

THE PEOPLE: Warm and friendly, something I've come to expect during a five-year acquaintance with this affluent corner of Surrey. One chap, later to pop up behind the bar, went out of his way to show my wife how to access the clubhouse. Finding one's way in felt like a challenge from the Crystal Maze.

THE WEATHER: Cloudless, which meant glorious light (furnish'd and burnish'd by Aldershot sun?) then bitter cold as the day died. Thank goodness, in such an

exposed spot, there wasn't any wind. At the final whistle, we scuttled gratefully for the heat of the car and Charlotte Green's deliciously plummy intonation on 5 Live's Sports Report.

THE GROUND: Setting, in this case, is everything. The Recreation Ground's elevated location offers superb views to the south and west. The venue is within the confines of an extremely pleasant public park. Prior to the mid-Seventies, Frimley Green played on one of two extant lower pitches and the changing rooms were on what is now a car park at the south end of the present ground. The clubhouse, erected in 1972, pre-dates it but became the main structure along the Recreation Ground's west touchline. It looks like a park pitch developed piecemeal and made good to meet grading requirements. There is a kit stand on the east touchline at the foot of a beacon-topped grassy hill. The slope eases, but is still apparent, as it melds, into the pitch. The clubhouse, tiny inside, houses a bar and kitchen. Dressing rooms and a function room are contained in an extension. Two small covers are positioned in front. An ugly palisade fence encloses the Recreation Ground, which has ball-snagging nets on poles behind each goal. At the north end, the netting protects blooms in the back gardens of red-brick semis. The ground's whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

THE GAME: Built steadily to an exciting climax. Cove, struggling in the bottom five, were denied a point only by the width of a crossbar, which they struck in the fourth minute of stoppage time. Not sure the visitors deserved a draw. Frimley Green were on top for most of the first half and, in the 53rd minute, when 1-0 up, denied by a largely unimpressive referee what appeared a stonewall penalty. He got wrong several big decisions early in the second half. This led to short tempers and a flurry of unnecessary bookings. I was rather surprised the game reached its conclusion with a full complement of players. The hosts took the lead nine minutes before the end of a scrappy first half when Jamie Connor dived full length to head in a Nick Thumwood cross. Cove equalised in the 73rd minute with a well-struck 20-yard free-kick only for Louis Hibbert (the player tripped for the spot-kick not awarded) to regain Frimley Green's lead after the visitors failed to clear their lines at a corner. Cove squandered two good chances in the closing stages then saw a speculative lob come back off the woodwork.

THE PROGRAMME: Pretty basic with little inside a bland cover to persuade regulars to part with a quid every time they attend. Bears the hallmarks of an issue compiled merely to meet the league's programme production requirement.

THE VERDICT: Pleased to see Plan B proved better than Plan A. We got two more goals than at Camberley Town, a more exciting game and a very pleasant ground was seen to best effect in perfect weather.

04/20